

DELTA

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THE CIRCLE OF MY FAMILY

OWEN THOMAS

The circle of my family sit like lonely people
Busied quietly and hearing to the night.
Against the elbow of the house pulls a long low chord,
Thrumming tight-drawn; strings, sea-damp. Then flies
Up the wind like nothing and around the house
Sailing on through rain by the shore.

Nod at the fire;
The coals creak and settle next the jaunty
Fire-flap and smoke.
Nod by our scullery cat poured out on the hearth
Filling and falling with sleep.

My mother talks with a pen on paper
It moves and whispers and moves.
My grandfather speaks when he turns his page
With his thumb, and it lisps over.
But I love her whose fingers creep in the mute velvet
Pricking and tucking gravely with her needle.

SIX YOUNG MEN

TED HUGHES

The celluloid of a photograph holds them well—
Six young men, familiar to their friends.
Four decades that have faded and ochre-tinged
This photograph have not wrinkled the faces or the hands.
Though their cocked straw hats are not now fashionable
Their shoes shine. One imparts an intimate smile,
One chews a grass, one lowers his eyes, bashful,
One is hysterical with cocky pride—
Six months after this picture they were all dead.

All are trimmed for a Sunday jaunt. I know
That bilberried bank, that thick tree, that black wall,
Which are there yet and not changed. From where these sit
You hear the water of thirty streams fall
To the roarer in the bottom, and through all
The leafy valley rumouring of air go;
Pictured here, their expressions listen yet,
And still that valley has not changed its sound.
Though their faces are four decades under the ground.

This one was shot in an attack and lay
Calling in the wire, then this one, his best friend
Went out to bring him in and was shot too;
And this one, the very moment he was warned
From potting at tin-cans in no-man's land,
Fell back dead with his rifle-sights shot away.
The rest, nobody knows what they came to,
But come to the worst they must have done, and held
It closer than their hope : all were killed.

It is fearful seeing a man's photograph,
The locket of a smile, turned overnight
Into the hospital of his mangled last
Agony and hours; see bundled in it
His mightier-than-a-man dead bulk and weight :
And on this sole place that keeps him alive
In his Sunday best, see war's worst
Thinkable flash and rending, and onto his smile
Forty years rotting into soil.

That man's not more alive whom you confront
And shake by the hand, see hale, hear speak loud,
Than any of these six celluloid smiles are,
Nor prehistoric nor fabulous beast more dead;
Your hand's less vivid than their splashing blood :
To regard this photograph might well dement,
Such contradictory actual horrors here
Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out
One's own body from its instant and heat.

NIEUWERKERK (Zeeland)

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

Only the sea-wind to-night is still awake
In the main street of the village, scouring the slates.
Pollen has doped each flower like limp flags drooping
In grief beside the ditches. Spring can spare
No covering for these crutches of drowned trees.

But the lamb, the foal, the fresh life coming
Breathes calmly in the straw, with soft flanks heaving
At peace, and swift grass binding
The axles of rusted carts; now is the turn of the living.

Neat and erect on every window-sill
Exposed to view, the potted plants parade,
And only sea winds to-night patrol the skyline
Where two years back I watched giant hands of cranes
Dig out the dawn.

TO THE POETS OF THE CELTIC TWILIGHT

A. R. MORTIMER

But was it here you saw
That poet weary of wandering,
Long-haired upon the scuttering shore,
Usheen, come back from Tírn'an Og?
When you heard on that Dublin pavement
"Lake water lapping" in a Georgian square,
Did you hear the waves of abandonment
Breaking over Connaght, where
The Fiddler of Dooney puts away his bow,
Knowing that the ceildh dancing feet
Have gone where he cannot go?

You saw the willows and the oaks
Stand silver in the summer night,
And men in strange embroidered cloaks
Walking beneath the trembling trees;
But were blind to the calloused fingers
Rubbing the single railway ticket,
The holdings where a bent back lingers
To watch the driving rain, and leave
The turf uncut as the seasons pass,
The plough to rust and the wheel to rot
And the broken slate in the switch grass.
Did you realise when you awaited
Those elegant copies, green from the printer,
What volumes it would take to fill
The empty parish register?

If you could hear the raw-faced men return
Singing or cursing from the fields,
Knuckles like rocks beneath the fern,
Lean and hard as the living they clutch,
Then you might know that Coalte and Finn
Were walking by a fair-weather sea
Deep in some Irish Arcady.

FIVE POEMS BY VINCENT BUCKLEY
WALKING IN IRELAND

*(Note :—The three bulls' heads are the presumed arms of
the Buckleys)*

Everything here, strange in its very nearness,
Perplexes me like the shape of a foreign room.
My foot shrinks from the kindly grass,
And my hands, like leaves dragging against the rain,
Draw down from everything I touch
This low landscape wrinkling in its autumn.
The dog going with a limp tail,
The cock with his red-rimmed drunkard's eye,
And the mincing waterbirds, will turn
To quiz me as I go, with book in pocket,
Who am not of their soil—nor any soil.

How can I find my fathers in this darkness?
Remote and blank as on an heraldic stone
I see them enter their converging lives.
The peasant with his dung-encrusted boots,
Bearing temple or pyramid on his shoulder;
A priest, with lines of money on his face,
Drawing the signs of his fate from book and candle;
The veteran speaking of forgotten wars
Or wars that never happened;
And the poet strangling words
That come like gouts of blood in a strange language :
These are who look forward to my strangeness,
These build for me a world I cannot know.

Yet still in my groin the goad of ancestry
Stings them awake. Earth livid, earth frozen,
Earth blown over with the turning year,
Unhappy earth, you are mine as well as theirs.
Why, this green mound, with its three cross-trees,
May hide the damp ring of their bones.
And if I should pick my way across the ling,
Holding the fighting brambles back, I might
Come on some indentation there, some rise
Or special colour that would tell me of them;
Or draw some spirit up, to represent
The Irish adam shivering in me,
Pressing their sod, feeling again the archaic
Malice that is the marrow of their bones.
Then priest, soldier, farmer, balladist,
Would pipe for this dance I tread on the foreign road.

And the three bulls' heads on their shields,
(Static and stupid, our queer notion of honour)
Gaze sideways at the whirlpool of the past
Yet somehow, still, engage my eyes.
And I turn downward with the year,
Becoming each of my unhappy fathers,
Shrink with the grass, bend like the early rain,
Glance with the cock's red-rimmed eye,
Tread lightly, turning, as the waterbirds,
To see myself against the earth's shield
As against a pall, or tapestry of autumn.
Even on this walk, some deed is done.
Can anything, in the gathering light, be foreign?

WELL, THEN, BE TRINCULO . . .

Well, then, be Trinculo for a day
If fancy or your glands insist.
Wear antlers in the dull noonday;
Cuckold a blind man; bark at girls;
And then, tired of the morning's play,
Station yourself in the dust-whirls,
Waiting for Prospero to die.

There's many ways of courting death.
One's to squat at the open door
To catch a magus' hissing breath—
Rubbing your dry palms on your thighs,
Peering at shadows, taking a gulp
Of the grog you've cannily laid in store.
And it will not be Prospero that dies.

Intrepid guardian of the intense!
The air still recommends itself
Dryly and dourly to your sense.
But give away death, and the mystery
That groans in sleep in a dark room.
Run down the stone's heaving shelf
To Caliban's domestic sty.

Or imagine a city built around
These grinning shores, effacing the sea.
There you could meet, on equal ground,
Prospero anonymous in tweeds;
Or on Caliban's rock, your town estate,
You could lounge all day, and hear each night
The harlots mewing in the street.

WILLOW AND FIG AND STONE

The weight of sap, and the weight of stone :
The two kingdoms leaning on each other,
And the smoke, or clouds, travelling over.
Here, we say, are age and certainty:
But look, and see
The mime of a bridal without feeling,
A drama fit for no transfiguration,
A city, or a siege, or argument.

Windows enclose their light. I lean
On a curved bridge, quaint, and doubled in the water,
To see the squat swans barely moving, drawing
The widening triangle after them, of water.
An oar thumps gaily. The Fellows' garden fumes
Gently, being less coarse than earth.
The willows lean and sway,
Midwiving this autumn of the big belly;
And briefly, as always, I am drawn to them,
The soft fall, the pitying concern,
Light against dusty fronds.
Poor midwives ! Carrying at attention
Only the flush of our endemic sickness,
A green dusted with uncertain movement,
Arms without pulse, shadows of hands
That will not reach to the quick of any womb.
Turn round, and close your eyes; these will not dance.
Murder was met here, centuries ago.
Now they lay new paths. The autumn breeze
Is preface to neat lawns, mosaic of jade.
Willows lisp to the oar.
I bear it all with a blank face.

If the fig find itself, its insatiable past,
A lived growth, and not of tapestry,
But the secret palpable unity with wind,
What shall it find more than a blank face?
This small, this faintly notched, this scarcely brown,
Holding as in a belly the tensing pulp, ,
A ready mottle of pink, a seed like man's,
Soft incorruption waiting for a hand;
The broad spined leaf
Becoming at the tip gentle, curling
Over it like hair over the nape :

Visitant of a knuckled tower
And leaves consorting in green pyramid.
I lie down, beneath,
And feel its tension swelling in my mind.

My father had a fig-tree
Set beside a vine,
Ancient nurse or enemy
To me and mine. . . .

At any rate, a precision of opposites,
Certain in landscapes as in men.
From where I drowse, reclining, questioning,
The towers are steady in the travelling fume.
And in a footfall by near-stagnant water
Murder recreates itself. The stone
Bowed down in leaves delivers the wound,
I feel the stealth in woods, the blood in throat,
The body's clumsy lunge to the short blade,
The victor's laugh, wiping unsteady hands. . . .

Hold tight, my country, to your wounded son,
Poet, or bawd, or hunted animal
That turns and shows its armour, while the light
Concentrates green upon the brown of fig.

COLLOQUY AND RESOLUTION

All beasts are beasts of prey. We spend
Our nameless anger in the bruit
Against each other's loins, and end
Partners in our hot pursuit.

Or so we've heard, and heard. The case
Is argued nightly, while the moon
Runs on her level climbing course
And the trees loosen their weight for noon,

For a great sun striking leaf and breast.
Those thousand beds of argument!
But we will clasp, and feed, and rest
Still, as of old, impenitent.

The young moon heals her drowsy sky.
Ah, could I breathe my urgent breath
Into your nostrils, so decry
Those plaguing words, we'd ravish death

And bring all walls to bud, and make
Our senses prefaces of light,
A glitter of strands no cry might break,
Midsummer fibres of delight.

And what of what we've heard, that love
Is the scaly palm, the sweating bed?
Now in the twining arms' remove
Envision the uprising head :

When, out of the pit, from the hurt womb
That is our half-world of desire,
The child shall rise and, unconsumed,
Light with his hands the healing fire.

TO BRIGID IN SUSSEX

When I think of you first, it is not a real presence
But a sort of gesture, as when the dawn whitens
Our flat horizon, magnifying our hills
Till they seem almost a retreat of mountains :
A vagueness the clouds have in a floating sunset
Drifting their shadows on your small face,
On your heart expressed in a shiver of rose-colour.

So the remembering shifts, and comes to bear
On your very self, on the felt inward thing.
By a green winter sea your large eyes wait
Behind the new glasses with their pink faint rims,
And your hands perhaps panic, grasping your beret on
In the high wind that ravel's your mother's skirt.

And I wait too, feeling, unseasonably,
Self-eaten, tired almost to despair.
The wind glows here too, but tintured by mist.
The sky is immense, but the stone measures it
To lives taken in self-pity or in work :
Or do I feel only the vagueness of space between us?

Paused, then, for a moment in this gap of stone,
I try for the live waiting that's your face,
And reach only eyes or hands or a flooding of colour.
Will the space I dread carry my effort to you?
Or shall I, after this labour of recognition,
Find myself only a mirror polishing stone,
Or a man's ghost staring in a silent road?

EVERY MAN HIS OWN ORACLE: Some Recent Verse

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

My title I have borrowed from a poem by a Mr. W. Price Turner who appears in *Mavericks*, edited by Howard Sergeant and Dannie Abse (published by Editions Poetry and Poverty, 8, Eton Avenue, London, N.W.3, at 6/-). *Mavericks* is a pleasantly readable anthology, but hardly a remarkable one. *Delta* readers will find little new to them in the two letters from the editors to each other which serve as an Introduction, and spend much time explaining why an alternative to Conquest's *New Lines* anthology (reviewed in *Delta* No. 10) was needed. In fact both the conclusions and the quotations have been arrived at before. What of the poetry? Here the editors seem to have taken their cue too much from "the other side", and in their desire to avoid bad principles have kept almost entirely to a minor key. Most of the verse here is conversational, occasional, ironic. J. C. Hall, rarely more than a pale reflection of Yeats, typifies much of the common attitude in these lines from *The Playground by the Church* :

I think how Valery once, among the graves
Beside that most ancient sea, cried out in vain
'O Life ! We must live, must live !' The indifferent waves
Flung back unsolved the final paradox

This, surely, was to be expected. Though rarely overdone in particular places (except for Dannie Abse, whose *Master*, conveying considerably more passion than poetry, verges always on the sensational) most of these poets too easily invoke grief, tears, and other 'poetic' stock attitudes. Of the other seven poets included—David Wright, Vernon Scannell, Michael Hamburger, John Smith, Anthony Cronin, W. Price Turner, and Jon Silkin—only the first two provoke much excitement, though Hamburger's *After Christmas* contains some unusually bitter satire :

. . . The Magi in three chauffeur-driven cars
Begin their homeward journey round the wars

but none of these poets is young enough and good enough to be a discovery, and no neglected genius is disinterred. If I now add that I find John Smith's work prolix and Dylanthomist, or suggest that Jon Silkin is syntactically slack, with no sense of rhythm, will anyone mind? Something far more radical is needed to oust Mr. Conquest and his boys. For the moment one minor poet is virtually as good, or as bad, as another. We can, however, be thankful to the editors for an attractively produced little book.

It is difficult to see quite how John Holloway's name came to be Associated with Messrs. Wain and Conquest, for his book, *The Minute* (Faber, 10/6) as a whole gives an effect of uncertainty, as much in idiom as in mood, which seems to ally him rather with certain of the Romantics than with the generation of Lucky Jim.

His poems more often question than state, he is more thoroughly and consistently sceptical than Larkin—with whose style he has much in common—and one feels a philosophical basis for these poems, combined with a psychological obsession with the freakish. (*In the Dark* is an interestingly sinister distortion of nonsense-poem techniques). The first quality is easy enough to demonstrate; take, for instance, this stanza from *The Life and Adventures of heroic Mr. Clubman*):—

His formal education sought to train
Mens sana in . . . you know the concept. And
The pedant has, you know, a first class brain
Although no doubt deteriorating, and
Idly perverted to a trivial end.
(Yet who shall say what end is trivial
Or legislate about such things at all?)

Such scepticism is in itself negative, and no lasting basis for poetry. But when Mr. Halloway implies positive values, the result is hesitant in the extreme:

This cold is for inaction.
Friends are a function solved in time and space.
In winter real roots are rare.
Once they might all have made a single circle
In a walled city with a simple centre.
Now the pattern of the map is blurred :
A diaspora from a random cast.
Not judgment. The judging eye is closed.
Only the poet preserves the speaking voice;
And that only with care and choice of phrases;
If it did not come there would be nothing.

(*A Voice for Winter*)

Note the inability here to control what is being said either by image or rhythm, so much of this is mere statement, in no way heightened or concentrated, mere interim jottings. Yet each idea, taken individually, is clear enough, I think. What is lacking is structure, and, more basically, conviction.

Many of his verse forms seem arbitrary, having little relation to their themes or subjects (e.g., *Recognition Scene* where whatever discipline the rhyme and metre might have given is neutralised by making the enjambement not a disturbance of the rule, but virtually the rule itself.) The presence of fill-in words and phrases in the first passage quoted ('you know', 'no doubt') suggest the syntax is not so much flabby as uncertain. Often a single Augustan line will stand out from a mass of excess adjectives, as if the poet were using them as short cuts to certainty and accuracy. But when he does speak out it is in a very Yeatsian manner:

Now it is time I made my will.
I choose damned fools and charlatans
To start with : boasters, loud-voiced men . . .

(see also *The Light*, especially with its invocation in the final stanza of 'crazy things and holy'). Although, at a time when magazines publish only short poems — as column-fillers — one admires Mr. Holloway's persistence in writing longer poems, his forte in this book seems to be the lyric, while among the long poems it is the lyrical passages that are the most successful, simply because they are more tightly controlled. The following stanza, again from *A Voice for Winter*,

A monster is the pitch of likelihood
A lowland river is the one to flood
A germless table is to make us bleed
A whole year sober then one bare night mad
What the trim pattern had made one thread destroyed

though quoted by the *New Statesman's* reviewer, bears repetition, not only because it illustrates one of Mr. Holloway's most obsessive themes, but also because it shows that he can at times produce a stark line and a convincing general conclusion. One does not need to dabble like the Poetry Society in the 'craft of verse' to realise that many of Mr. Holloway's attempts at casualness set a very bad example to younger poets, and are at odds with his true poetic nature. On the other hand, poems like *Journey through the night* or *Warning to a guest* have most point and interest because they present a point of view, concisely and powerfully expressed in terms of the poet's characteristic landscape and atmosphere of travel, night, winter, the sea. This is a book worth reading even for its failures, for, writing from wide-ranging and serious concerns, Mr. Holloway is rarely trivial.

The contrast between *The Minute* and the work of another don, C. A. Trypanis' *The Stones of Troy*, is remarkable, for Professor Trypanis rarely goes beyond his native Greece for his themes and landscapes. Not only this, but most of his poems are based on incidents of classical myth or history, seen through modern eyes. Consequently the 'poetic' quality comes rather from nostalgia, from the evocation of names and events familiar to every classically-educated English schoolboy rather than from any awareness on the reader's part of a unique personal insight. 'Personal' is indeed the last word one would apply to this selection. The poems are intensely inbred, rarely having life outside their narrative contexts and taking over even their values wholesale from the classics. This does not mean that Professor Trypanis does not deal with pain, agony, blood, splendour, death, etc. On the contrary, the words appear on every page, but they are, as it were, behind inverted commas; the narrator speaks always in character. Only rarely, as in *The Blood*, from the title sequence, does there appear any sense of personal involvement. Elsewhere there are striking phrases enough, and warm, pleasantly sensuous evocations of landscape (linked nevertheless with an insistence on the traditional marble.

gold, oil, etc.) but noticing how, say, *Homecoming* or *Winter Afternoon's Walk* evade the larger issues they raise by relapsing into picturesque description, one is left with the impression that these felicities are decorative rather than structural, a frieze rather than a column.

I will not pretend to know what has been omitted from Lawrence Durrell's *Selected Poems* (Faber, 10/6) but the Oxford or Cambridge reader who wishes to put this volume into perspective, might consult Bernard Bergonzi's article in *Gemini*. Durrell is a founder-member of a fairly new tradition of English poetry (Bernard Spencer and Alan Ross would be two others) that centres on the Mediterranean and uses its landscape to full picturesque effect as a background to their contemplation of love and a rather richer, more sensuously satisfying life than they would have found perhaps in Britain. Yet though Durrell is scholarly (sometimes obscure) and wisely tolerant, his poems avoid being merely laconic evocations, by virtue not so much of any compelling rhythm or movement (apart from the specifically lyric poems, I find Mr. Durrell's movement curiously inert) but rather by a sort of genuinely connoisseur-like urbanity. (See for instance the concluding lines of *Heloise and Abelard*.) Often, however, the meaning is a matter more of vivid images. In *Portrait of Theodora*, typical of the *other*, the dingily provincial side of Durrell's décor :

Then in another city from the same
Twice-used air and sheets, in the midst
Of a parting; the same dark bedroom,
Arctic chamber-pot and cruel iron bed,
I saw the street lamp unpick Theodora
Like an old sweater, unwrinkle eye and mouth
Unbandaging her youth to let me see
The wounds I had not understood before.

the images seem appropriate, exact, controlled. At other times, they can be arbitrary—visually untrue and emotionally unilluminating (e.g., 'and the heart of someone / Hanging upon its hinges like a gate . . .'). My overall impression remains one of a rich confusion—too much imagery coupled with an intellectual rather than an emotional control of the scenes he presents.

John Press's first book of poems, *Uncertainties* (Oxford University Press, 10/6) is impressive mainly because it belies its title; for Mr. Press has the initial advantage of something to say, and in nearly every poem he succeeds in saying it lucidly and unequivocally. The total effect is of experience and conviction which he does not attempt to blur or play down by irony.

Technically also Mr. Press is assured, even at times to the point of innocence, especially in his use of cliché :

Through sin and guilt's disorting glass
We see the universe awry . . .

or of flatness

... Mount Lycabettos
The summit that dominates
Athens and its environs...

Likewise *A Dialogue* (between Man and Angel), though obviously important for the poet, fails, I found, to sustain interest simply because there is logical and intellectual coherence, but no dominant imagery, no real drama in the language itself. On the other hand in *The Earl of Rochester*, Mr. Press shows himself quite capable of variety in the monologue form he has chosen to express that court-poet's fluctuations between licence and repentance, while in the handling of regular stanza forms he seems to be one of the very few contemporary poets who have *learnt* something from Yeats as distinct from merely imitating his grand style. Though the sheer mechanics of his longer poems seem awkward at times, little is superfluous and he shows a refreshing willingness to attempt the general statement (e.g., 'The false abstraction triumphs everywhere') backed by very specific instance and imagery. I find this whole poem, *Unused Words*, remarkable for its power and directness.

Nearly all these poems, covering an unusually wide range of mood, landscape, and concern, are pervaded by an intense awareness of the demonic. One finds a continual contrasting of sensuality and Christian asceticism, of lust versus love, civilisation versus cruelty, of a decadent versus a primitive culture. Or, rather, one feels a continuous interpenetration of the two, an awareness that civilised values are vital because they are only skin deep. The following stanza might well stand as Mr. Press's *leitmotif*:

Behind a fragile world of coquetry
And twirling fans and ceremonial
There lurks arrayed in lust and cruelty
The calculating raging animal.

It was a theme dear also to Swift. Mr. Press's mood is, however, one of foreboding: Frequently he is able—temporarily—to resolve or ignore some of these conflicts and he produces then a calm, sensual appreciation of love, and of a mainly African natural world. But if, in the title-poem, the contrast, for all its truth, has been forced into the poem, so that it appears contrivedly simple:

These tinkling dowagers neither know nor care
That outside there is hunger and despair
Unwanted children and the dance-hall's glare

it is nevertheless ever-present, and Mr. Press's strength lies just here, in his ability to praise both, to be aware of both at the same time:

But those possessed by rumours of that sea
Who spend their lives in two worlds wandering
With neither sure faith nor a firm despair
Find a strange beauty in their suffering.

Mr. Press frequently reaches, I feel, a much clearer vision of life as it now is than do many of the much vaunted 'angry young men'

whose impotent discontent verges so nearly on self-pity. It is a pity he has been denied a Poetry Book Society *imprimatur* when several of its recent recipients have been so safe and unadventurous; Mr. Press deserves to be read widely.

To judge by their weekly cyclostyled broadsheet *Poetry and Audience*, Leeds must be about the most poetically active of British universities. One is glad, therefore, of a chance to review *Leeds University Poetry* 1956, edited by Gordon F. Heard and George Campbell, 1 '6, from the Dept. of English Literature. Even without contributions by John Heath Stubbs, Thomas Blackburn (the present Gregory Fellow in Poetry), Robin Skelton, and Geoffrey Hill, this anthology would compare favourably with the last three 'Oxbridge' anthologies. What is so interesting is the lack of literariness—a genuinely popular swing about John Hill's

Tobacco grains and fluff
in the pockets of the hills, gruff
of people, steep of tillage,
throngs my grandad's worry of a village

or the firm grip on reality actually converted into a poem by James Simmons, instead of remaining random social-realist jottings :

But none appear, save here
A thin child drawing a face
On her grey steamed window,
And here watching the roof
Here in this lonely place,
A negro standing in a waterproof
Sad as October, who lingers
Like a gaunt tree, letting leaves
Drift from his listless fingers

Several of these poems in fact share a strongly visual quality and an attention to significant detail. One can pick holes, of course, and there are indeed bad poems, but there is also variety (see George Campbell's wry and witty love poem, or Don Meldrum's *The Underwriter's Clerk*—really funny pastiche Chaucer for once). And finally there are Geoffrey Hill's four poems. He is one of the few contemporary poets who combines intellectual and emotional control with an assured feeling for stress and cadence, so that his work is best read aloud. Take this, from *The Distant Fury of Battle*:

Grass resurrects to mask, to strangle
Words glossed on stone, lopped stone-angel;
But the dead maintain their ground—
That there's no getting round—
Who in places vitally rest,
Naked, anonymous; who test
Alike the endurance of yews
Laurels, moonshine, stone, all tissues.

The whole anthology is a very worth while achievement.

H. COOMBS

Worth while criticism of Lawrence demands greater emotional experience than is to be found in most critics; it demands too a more than usual clear-sightedness and a courage to avoid evasion and rationalisation. And if a critic undertakes a whole book on Lawrence it is an advantage to have an active sympathy with at least some of the important works and aspects of Lawrence's art and mind. We now have a right, in 1957, to expect something good from a lengthy considered criticism. I have to say that for me Mr. Hough's book satisfied no hopes or expectations.

How can a man write well about Lawrence unless he is vitally interested in him? And can anyone who in writing about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and while saying that Lawrence is simply describing in familiar language what everybody knows, asks more than once if this is useful for the development of the novel, be vitally interested in Lawrence? The development of the novel! Was Lawrence to be thinking about that when he was writing *Lady Chatterley* or anything else? I have a sense here of an examination paper lying across Lawrence's pages.

It isn't of course necessary for the writer about Lawrence to live in a wood or on a mountain or an island. By no means. But it is necessary for such a writer to have some feeling for what Lawrence meant by the cosmos, and Mr. Hough seems to me to have none of it: references to 'inana' and 'quivering joy' (see his remarks on *The White Peacock*) do not get anywhere near the centre. And with that feeling ought to go a respect—Lawrence's genius being what it is—for the intensity of Lawrence's purpose, of his concern. Mr. Hough speaks of Lawrence as being 'little interested in the flavour of ordinary daily intercourse'; he says, 'No doubt Lawrence's speciality is the study of certain obscure states of the human soul'. While this does not exactly turn Lawrence into an occultist it does suggest a Lawrence who is removed from central human affairs. And it is perhaps in part this notion that causes Mr. Hough to feel superior to Lawrence. Lawrence, he says, never faced 'the rigour of the whole truth': Lawrence 'may be an emotional barbarian'; Lawrence had 'no idea of how men in the mass are really moved'. He puts Lawrence right on tragedy. He states that Lawrence doesn't realise what suffering is and what it entails—'The suffering of Miriam, of Clifford Chatterley, the full horror of the mutually destructive relation of Ursula (*sic*) and Gerald Crich—it is hardly too much to say that they are avoided'. This comes strangely from a critic who is so completely obtuse about the feelings of a man subjected to the kind of persecution that Lawrence was subjected to: '... the effect on Lawrence (he says of the banning of *Lady C.*) was to produce a good deal of blind anger, and a good deal of vapouring about frankness and freedom'. Lacking intuition—and

surely in such circumstances no exceptional degree of it is needed—Mr. Hough doesn't understand Lawrence's situation. If he had been a good literary critic he would not have spoken of blind anger and vapouring. He might have been more generous if he had been more discerning.

Mr. Hough gives scarcely a hint of Lawrence's humanity and tenderness, but there is a great deal about his 'cruelty'. About his cowardice too, though Mr. Hough doesn't quite dare to use the word. On the subject of war Mr. Hough plays safe: Lawrence showed towards the war 'a response so egotistical as to be almost insane'. Mr. Hough shows no sign of being aware that Lawrence's attitude towards the war was bound up with his whole concern for life and civilisation. He seems not to glimpse the meaning of Lawrence's 'One must speak for life and growth amid all this mass of disintegration'. His satisfaction with the *status quo*—for it is that, ultimately—leads him into a absurd 'psychological' explanation of the Nightmare chapter in *Kangaroo*: 'the hatred and disgust that fills the Nightmare chapter is self-hatred and self-disgust'. He is 'convinced' that Lawrence felt 'a deep inferiority' for not having been in the war; Lawrence felt that his position, among women as well as men(!), was 'deeply impaired by his non-participation in the crucial experience of his time'. Writing from an acquaintance with Lawrence's works as long as Mr. Hough's, I can only say that I think Mr. Hough is here palpably rationalising. Note too the journalistic simplicity of his attitude when he speaks of 'the crucial experience, etc.' His 'vision' is external: he subscribes to the naive conventional view of the 'greatness' of war as an experience.

Mr. Hough seems determined to hunt down cruelty in Lawrence. But Lawrence is never cruel as the word is ordinarily understood, and Mr. Hough, in this matter as in so many others, gives support to Lawrence's 'enemies'. Where on earth is the 'considerable element of cruelty' in *England, My England*? How could a responsible critic pronounce *The Princess* a product of 'doctrinaire cruelty'? Mr. Hough sees this tale as a 'Laurentian satire' of a situation where a cosmopolitan woman exploits a simple man for his 'sensational value'. As if this were not enough, we are told that not only Romero but Lawrence also 'wants to revenge himself on all cold white women, especially if they are rich'. Comic, but saddening too. It makes one wonder why Mr. Hough chose to write about Lawrence at all. I mean to write about him as an artist, which he claims to be doing. It seems pretty clear that he dislikes Lawrence as a man, and it is quite clear that he does not understand Lawrence's art. He takes the meaning out of every word Lawrence wrote.

The failure to understand is betrayed time and again by both remarks and tone. Misrepresentations like the following are common: '... two daughters, one cool, proud and withdrawn, the other buxom and outgoing'. This sort of simplification distorts and cheapens Lawrence, and if anyone does not care to take my word

for it will he or she please read Leavis on *Daughters of the Vicar*. Mr. Hough judges *The Fox* to be 'one of Lawrence's masterpieces of straightforward naturalistic narrative'. Those last three words, incredible! Again see Leavis. *Sun* is a 'dreary tale'; and here Mr. Hough's tone betrays too: he can only see the woman in *Sun* as 'sun-bathing all the time, and looking at a hard brown peasant'. The man-of-the-world insensitiveness and obtuseness are everywhere: '... gipsies, gamekeepers or what not—who carry off middle-class women to do them so much good'. Yet more than once Mr. Hough cosily invites his readers to share in the feeling of wide experience: 'We all know that love is much more fun'. Perhaps the nadir in the matter of tone and stupidity together is reached with, 'If you don't like men any more, go and live in New Mexico with a horse'. We have to conclude that at bottom Mr. Hough is a 'realist'; and like so many realists, possessing a good deal less knowledge of everyday actuality than he claims. I would like to challenge him, for instance, on every point that he makes on pages 182-3 about the alleged errors in *St. Mawr*. There is no evidence in *The Dark Sun* that its author has first-hand knowledge of English country life.

It's all in keeping that with the frequent no-nonsense tone there go lots of unusual words: metanoia, longanimity, incondite, propædæutics, theophany, etc. Learning! Alas, poor Lawrence. A paragraph here gives us Rousseau, The Declaration of Independence, Prometheus Unbound, Maritain, Irving Babbitt, Marx, Freud. Another there has a quotation from Dante, references to Dostoevsky and G. K. Chesterton, a Latin quotation and an unusual French word. Perhaps it is the display of that kind of knowledge—as breadth of reference it functions only at an abstract level far removed from living issues—which aided in leading one critic on to speak of the book's being 'brilliantly written'.

Or is it this sort of thing? '... the absolutely unknowable into which the spring and all the bright things of the world must pass'. Or the melodramatic gestures on the first page: 'convulsion', 'patched and battered', 'swept down the flood before his eyes', and so on. Whatever else was adjudged brilliantly written it can hardly have been sentences like the following, where syntax as well as understanding and tone is faulty: 'Dr. Leavis has rightly emphasised the range and grasp of Lawrence's picture of early twentieth-century England: but this is continually vitiated by presenting it as a place of vile tempers and no manners at all'.

But of course it was a reviewer and not Mr. Hough who claimed brilliant writing for the book. Several reviewers claimed completeness too. A silly claim, even from the spatial standpoint: the two specifically psychological books have a few lines each; *Twilight in Italy* is not mentioned at all: twenty-four pages cover the treatment

of the tales. Twenty-four ! Another claim was for Mr. Hough's 'bland sanity', which I suppose means a superior sort of common sense. Is it bland sanity that is shown when Mr. Hough asks, 'What could a man who never had an ordinary job, never had a place in a communion of men, never exercised or submitted to authority, know of political reality?' That sentence provides a good example of stolid unimaginativeness as well as being packed with plain untruths of fact. Is it bland sanity that makes Mr. Hough frequently contradict himself on important issues? On one page: 'It appears that they (Ursula and Screbensky) enjoy the fullest and completest sexual satisfaction'; on the opposite page, ' . . . a love like Ursula's and Screbensky's, which fails on all planes'. Several instances of radical self-contradiction of this kind could be given.

'Excitement' has been claimed for Mr. Hough's approach to Lawrence. Actually his attitude, even when he is ostensibly praising, tends to be marked by a curious negativeness. He finds *Daughters of the Vicar* 'remarkable'. In what way? 'Remarkable for its moderation and for the refusal of the picture to step outside the frame'. *The Rainbow* receives a similar negative and useless tribute: in it, Lawrence's 'sense of refinement and complexity is a less pallid and suburban affair' than in *The White Peacock*. Everywhere (except in parts of the Poetry chapter, where it is clear that Mr. Hough feels Lawrence's challenge to be less sharp), we are given the impression that when Lawrence does anything good it's because it isn't so bad as we might have expected from his own example. Of course, you can't expect a lot from a writer—Lawrence—who has 'the unsatisfactory habit of placing a slab of only partly digested autobiography in the centre of the picture'. Especially if you believe that it is 'possible that his doctrine (which doctrine, Mr. Hough?) is false, his influence evil'. But then, you can always have it both ways if you are not too particular: 'It is not surprising, then, that there should be varied opinions on *The Plumed Serpent*—that some should find it Lawrence's greatest visionary achievement, while others turn from it with disgust. The only surprising thing is that either view should exist unmixed—for both are justified'.

Mr. Hough seems to me to be too naively assured to be able to make the effort needed in facing up to the richly experienced Lawrence; he is lacking in imaginative sympathy, and in conviction and hence in force. The acclaimed blandness and sophistication cover what is in effect uncertainty. He faces both ways. And while not suggesting that the last half-dozen lines of *Things* are in all particulars revelant to the case, I do believe that Mr. Hough is insulated from successful Lawrence criticism by his being 'safe inside' and by a liking for 'lobster'.

P.S.—Perhaps it is an oversight that F. R. Leavis's name does not appear in the Index.

Contributions for the next issue of *Delta* should be sent to John Kimber or Michael Carthew at Downing College before the end of term.

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